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WORST AMONG EQUALS
Part I

Rogue archaeologist Doctor Aphra is on the run after narrowly escaping Imperial custody and the wrath of Darth Vader!

But a new enemy has revealed itself in the form of Aphra's former fellow inmate, Lopset, who is actually the psychotic Doctor Cornelius Evazan!

Evazan's latest scheme has trapped Aphra and her worst nemesis, the psychotic droid crime lord Triple-Zero, into an explosive confrontation....

SIMON SPURRIER
Writer

EMILIO LAISO
Art

RACHELLE ROSENBERG
Colors

VC's JOE CARAMAGNA
Letterer

ASHLEY WITTER
Cover Artist

ROD REIS
Variant Cover Artist

TOM GRONEMAN
Assistant Editor

MARK PANICCIA
Editor

C.B. CEBULSKI
Editor In Chief

JOE QUESADA
Chief Creative Officer

DAN BUCKLEY
President

Very Special Thanks - KIERON GILLEN

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Senior Editor ROBERT SIMPSON
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Lucasfilm Story Group JAMES WAUGH, LELAND CHEE, MATT MARTIN

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"ARE YOU SITTING COMFORTABLY?

WELCOME TO MILVAYNE, TRAVELERS. PRESENT I.D. AND AUTHORIZATION DOCUMENTS, PLEASE.

"THEN LET'S BEGIN.

"THE WOMAN ON THE RIGHT HERE IS SUBJECT ONE. HER NAME'S APHRA.

AUTHORIZATION? SURE. RIGHT HERE.

"SHE'S A DOCTOR OF--OH, ARCHEOWHATEVER. FOR OUR PURPOSES, SHE REPRESENTS SELF-CENTERED, CHAOTIC AND ACCIDENTAL EVIL.

"SHE'S BASICALLY A FLAMING DISASTER.

MA'AM, THIS IS IN FACT NOT A VALID PASS BUT AN INDIFFERENT AMOUNT OF CREDITS. ARE YOU ATTEMPTING A BRIBE?

UH. HAHAHA. O-OF COURSE NOT.

"SUBJECT TWO'S A DROID CALLED 'TRIPLE-ZERO.' YOU CAN'T SEE HIM BECAUSE WE'RE WATCHING THROUGH HIS EYES, BUT HE'S--WELL...

"HE'S SOMETHING QUITE SPECIAL."

YAAAAAAAAA!

DO PLEASE RAISE THE GATE, SIR. AS DELIGHTFUL AS IT WOULD BE TO DE-SKIN YOU LIKE A FRUIT, TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE.

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AH. THERE WE ARE. YOU'RE TOO KIND.
"SHE DESPISES AND FEARS HIM... HE YEARNS TO SLAUGHTER HER...
"THEY'VE JUST LANDED ON MILVAYNE--LITERALLY THE STUPIDEST PLANET TWO CRIMINALS WITH NO SCANDOCS COULD GO TO--
INFORM FOR CASH! INFORM TODAY!
REMEMBER: MILVAYNE IS NOW UNDER IMPERIAL PROTECTION! LIVE BY THE BOOK TO SPARE THE BLASTERS!
LOVE THE LAW! WATCH YOUR NEIGHBORS!
I HAVE A BAD FEELING ABOUT THIS.
"--AND I CALL THEIR SCENARIO: 'STUDY OF THE RECIPROCAL LONGEVITY OF VARIANT DREADFULNESS.'
"OR--IN LAYMAN'S TERMS--'HOW LONG BEFORE THE DUMB MONSTERS KILL EACH OTHER?'
"ANY QUESTIONS?"

"NUUUURRRRRT-RK-RK-RK-RK-RK?"

"AH, A **WORTHY** INQUIRY, MY FRIEND. WHY **WOULD** SUCH ABOMINATIONS TRAVEL TOGETHER?

WAIT! STAY **CLOSE**, YOU **PSYCHOTIC SCRAPHEAP!** REMEMBER THE **BOMBS!**

"EACH CARRIES AN **EXPLOSIVE IMPLANT, TRIGGERED** IF SEPARATED BY **TWENTY METERS**. KEEPS THEM **MOTIVATED**, SEE?"

THIRTY SECONDS, TRIP! WE'VE BEEN HERE **HALF A MINUTE** AND YOU ALREADY KILLED A COP! W-WE COULD'VE JUST GIVEN HIM A **BIGGER BRIBE!**

BUT THEN WE'D HAVE LESS **MONEY**. AND I WOULDN'T HAVE **MURDERED** ANYONE.

I DON'T SEE HOW THAT'S A BETTER OPTION AT **ALL**.

"RK-RK-NUURF-NUUUURK?"

"ANOTHER GOOD QUESTION! WHAT PURPOSE IS SERVED BY SUCH A CONTRIVED **SCENARIO?**

"WELL, AS YOU **KNOW**, I AM THE GALAXY'S FOREMOST **GUERRILLA SCIENTIST**--CHALLENGING **ETHICALITY** IN ALL ITS FORMS.

WAIT, DAMMIT!

"I'VE LIKEWISE BEEN CALLED AN ARTIST: PLUMBING THE **DEPTHS** OF **PERFORMATIVE SADISM** AND **ABOMINATION!**

"**EITHER** OF THESE THINGS WOULD JUSTIFY TODAY'S **EXPERIMENT**.

FREEZE, LAWBREAKER!

OH NO. IT'S THE LAW.

"AND YET, IF I BOIL IT **RIGHT** DOWN, I CONFESS I HAVE A MORE **PROFOUND** MOTIVE FOR FORCING THIS PAIR TOGETHER."

Far, Far Away.

I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE *FUNNY.*

OLD FRIEND, THE GALAXY *TREMBLES* AT THE INFAMY OF *DOCTOR CORNELIUS EVAZAN* AND *PONDA BABA*. WE MUST *LIE LOW.*

I SIMPLY THOUGHT *THIS* WOULD HELP PASS THE TIME WHILE I BUILD YOU A NEW *ARM.*

UNFORTUNATELY THE IDIOTS HAVE *ALREADY* PICKED A FIGHT WITH THE *COPS*, SO I DON'T EXPECT IT'LL LAST *LONG.*

AT THE VERY *LEAST* LET'S HOPE FOR AN ENTERTAINING CALAMITY.

MRRRK-KLT-HUUUUR?

AHHH-- WHY *MILVAYNE,* INDEED. WELL, IT'S *COMPLICATED...*

"SHORT VERSION: I WAS IN JAIL WITH APHRA. AT LEAST, UNTIL LITERALLY EVERYTHING BLEW UP. SHE HAS THAT EFFECT.
Tiferep Major. Ruins Of Accresker Jail.
"SHE'S THE SOLE HOLDER OF A DECRYPT KEY FOR SOME DATA THAT THE MURDER-DROID DESPERATELY WANTS. SO HE WAS ALREADY CIRCLING...
"AND THEN OUR OLD FRIEND TAM POSLA GOT INVOLVED."
YOU REMEMBER HIM? RESPECTED MILVAYNE LAWMAN TURNED INSANE VIGILANTE.
HENHH! WE DECRANIATED HIS PARTNER ON JEDHA. HAPPY TIMES.
"WELL, THERE WAS THIS TINY DROID WITH MORE GUNS THAN A STAR DESTROYER AND AN ASTEROIDAL PLANET STRIKE AND A FORCE-SENSITIVE FUNGUS LOOKING FOR A BODY AND--"
WELL, LOOK--NONE OF IT REALLY MATTERS.
IT'S ALL GONE, YOU SEE?

"THEY'RE ALL *DEAD*."

HHHHHRRRRRRJJJLISSSTICCCE

"I LEFT THOSE TWO *LOVEBIRDS* ABOARD POSLA'S *SHIP*, WITH NOTHING BUT THEIR WITS AND THEIR *MUTUAL HATRED*.

WAIT *WAIT WAIT! IF EITHER OF US DIES, BOTH BOMBS GO OFF! STOP--STOP IT--*

"I SUPPOSE THEY FOUND A LITTLE OF THE LAWMAN'S *MONEY*--ALL IN MILVAYNE *CREDITS*, OF COURSE, AND PERHAPS A FEW *CONTACTS*, BACK ON HIS HOMEWORLD..."

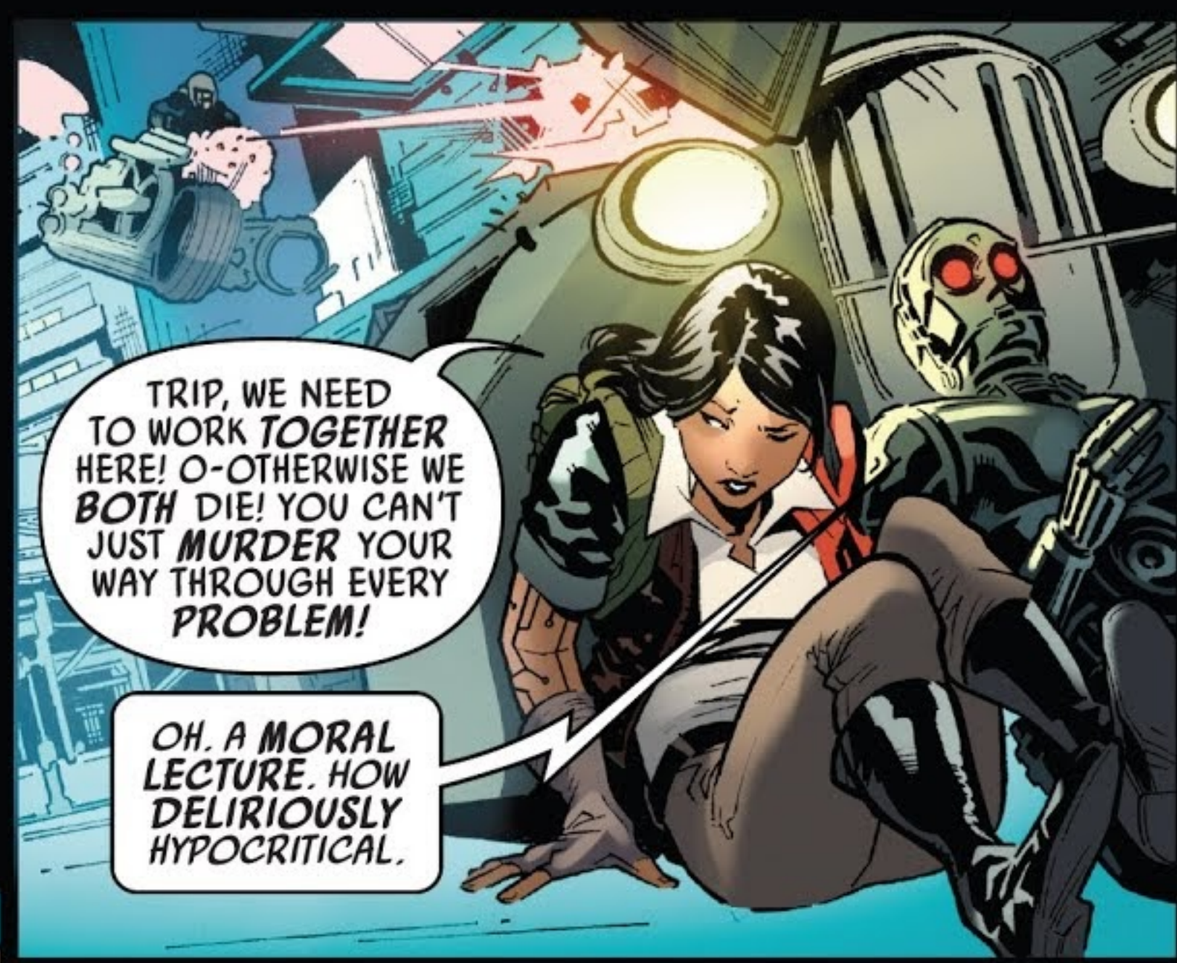
THIS ONE'S POSLA'S PERSONAL *CYBERNETICIST*. H-HEY, HEY, *TRIP*--

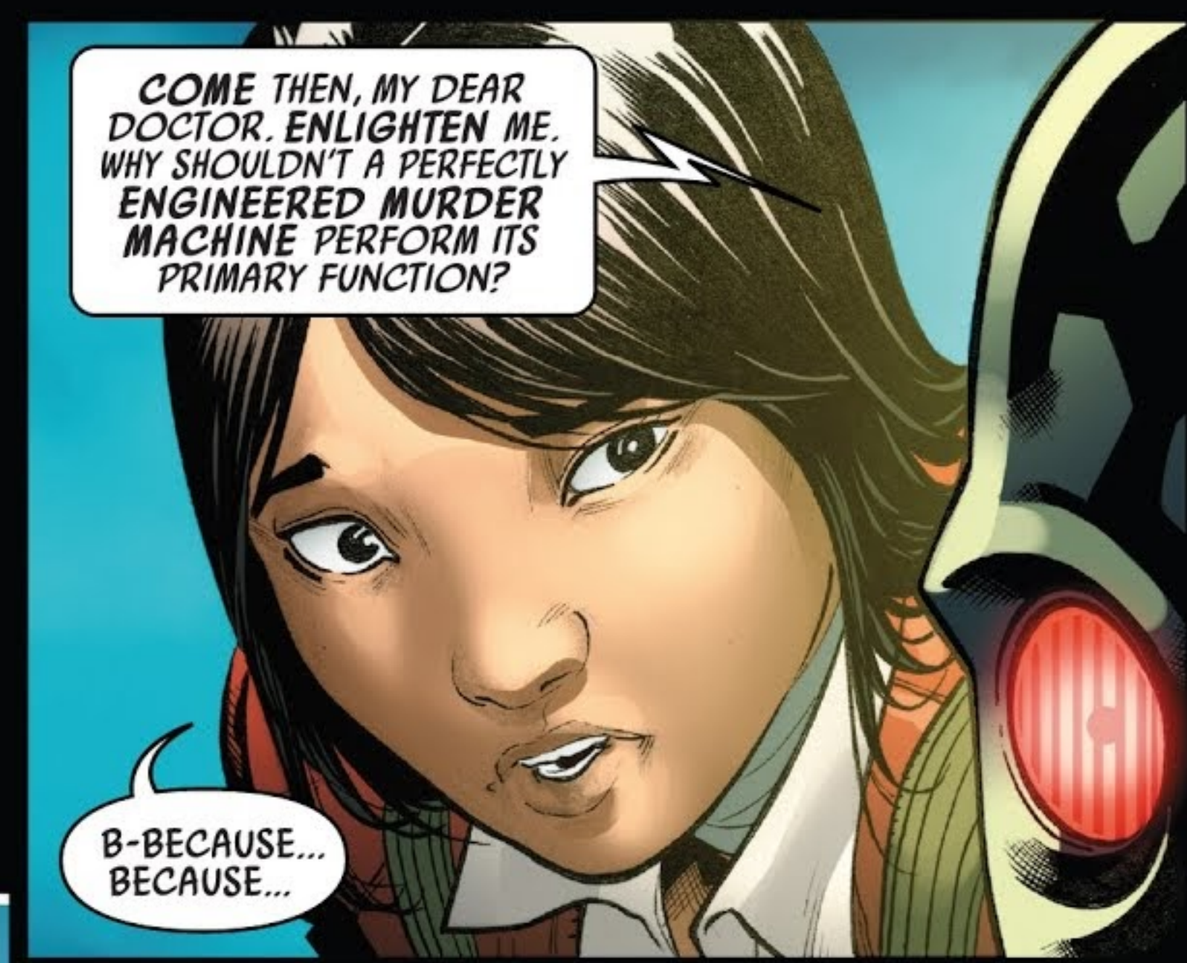
--THIS GUY COULD REMOVE THE BOMBS!

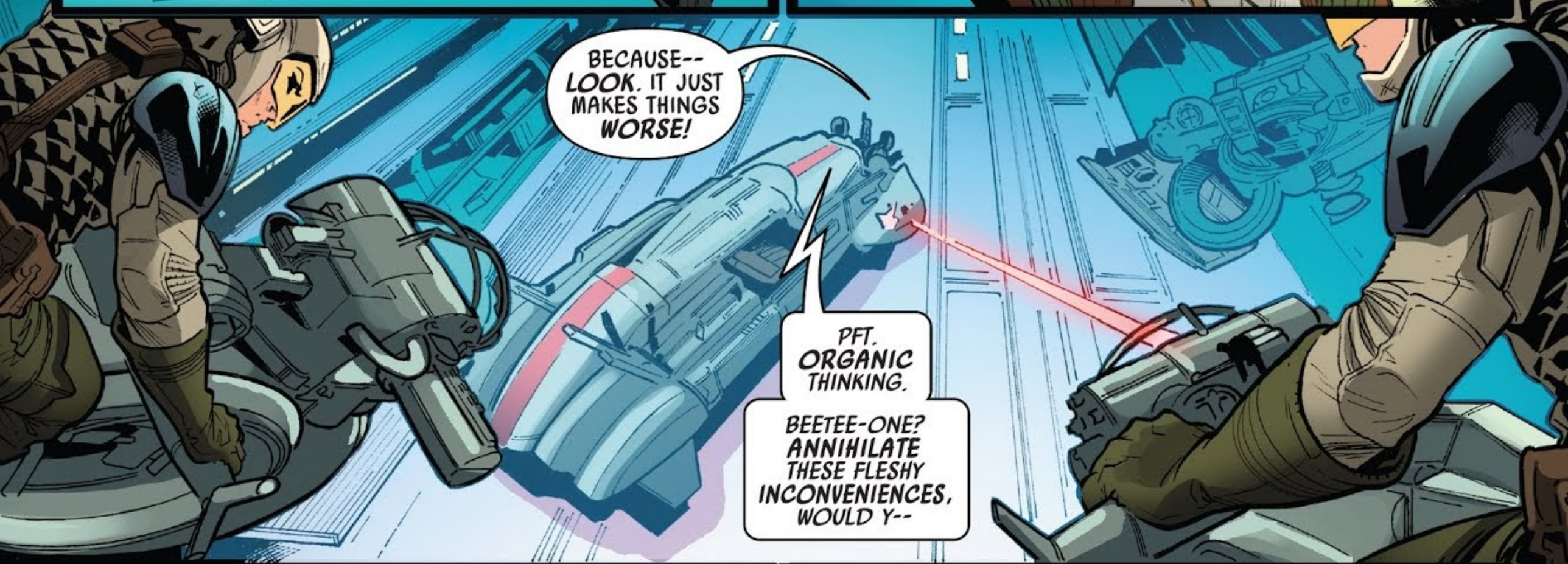
HOPE IS SUCH A WONDERFUL *PARAMETER* IN BEHAVIORAL STUDIES.

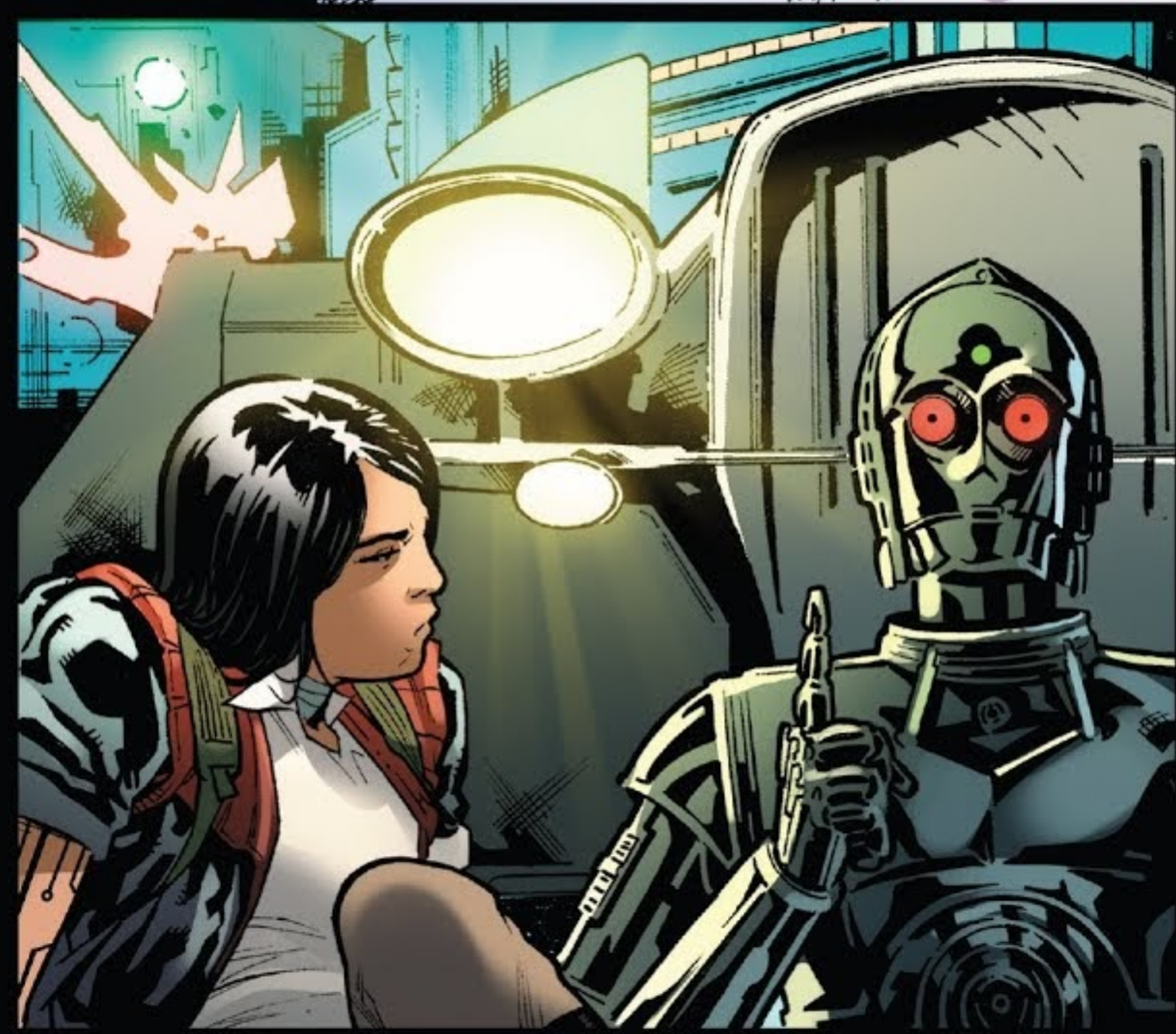
"IT MAKES CLEVER PEOPLE SO ENTERTAININGLY STUPID."
W-WE'RE DEAD OUT IN THE OPEN. WE NEED A VEHICLE!
STAY WITH ME, TRIP! THIS WAY!
POP!
BEEEEP BEEEP BEEEP
OH NO.
TRIP! MY PROXIMITY BOMB JUST ARMED! IT'LL BLOW IN SECONDS! I-IT THINKS WE'RE MORE THAN TWENTY METERS APART!
IT MUST BE MALFU--
TRIP?

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
THIS IS INDUBITABLY A NICER VEHICLE.
HKHH--
THERE, YOU SEE? THE BOMBS HAVE DISARMED. YOU REALLY SHOULD STAY CLOSE.
BUT--BUT-- YOU NEARLY BLEW US UP! IF WE'D TAKEN THE OTHER SPEEDER YOU WOULDN'T HAVE HAD TO KILL ANYONE!
BUT...
THIS ONE HAS A RED STRIPE.
SUSPECTED VEHICLE THEFT IN PROGRESS! I.D. REQUIRED! I.D. REQUIRED! I.D. REQUIRED!
OH DEAR. THIS REALLY IS THE MOST TEDIOUSLY LAWFUL OF WORLDS, ISN'T IT?

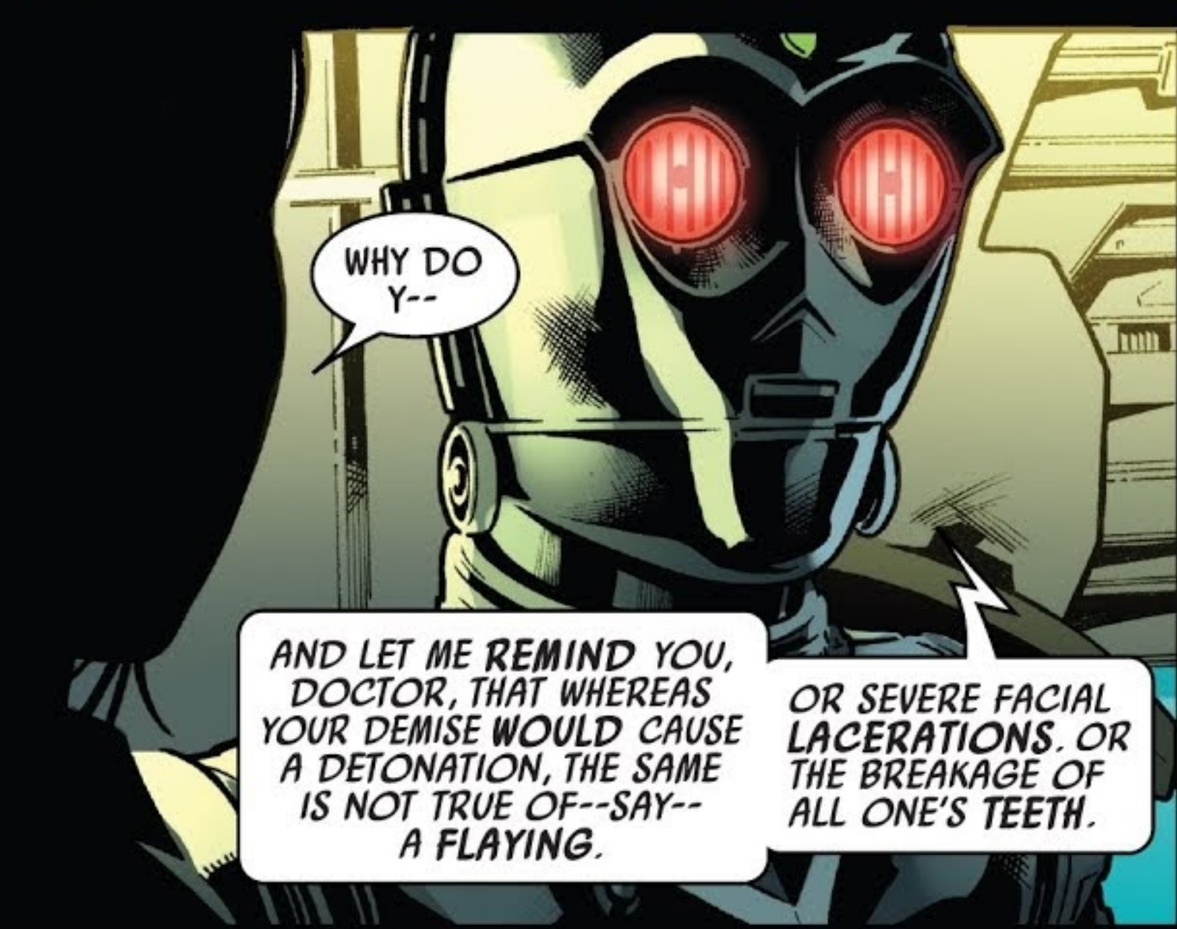

TRIP, WE NEED TO WORK TOGETHER HERE! O-OTHERWISE WE BOTH DIE! YOU CAN'T JUST MURDER YOUR WAY THROUGH EVERY PROBLEM!
OH. A MORAL LECTURE. HOW DELIRIOUSLY HYPOCRITICAL.


COME THEN, MY DEAR DOCTOR. ENLIGHTEN ME. WHY SHOULDN'T A PERFECTLY ENGINEERED MURDER MACHINE PERFORM ITS PRIMARY FUNCTION?
B-BECAUSE... BECAUSE...


BECAUSE-- LOOK. IT JUST MAKES THINGS WORSE!
PFT. ORGANIC THINKING.
BEETEE-ONE? ANNIHILATE THESE FLESHY INCONVENIENCES, WOULD Y--



BEETEE'S GONE, TRIP.
...
PASS ME OUR SHIP'S SECURITY FOB.


WHY DO Y--
AND LET ME REMIND YOU, DOCTOR, THAT WHEREAS YOUR DEMISE WOULD CAUSE A DETONATION, THE SAME IS NOT TRUE OF--SAY-- A FLAYING.
OR SEVERE FACIAL LACERATIONS. OR THE BREAKAGE OF ALL ONE'S TEETH.

JUST--WAIT A MINUTE. C-COMMUNICATE WITH ME HERE, TRIP. WHY DO YOU WANT TO ACCESS OUR SH--
BEEP
ALL UNITS! ASSIST SURVIVORS!
GO! GO!
YOU... YOU HIT THE S...SELF-DESTR...
AND NOW WE'RE FREE TO MOVE ALONG UNMOLESTED.
AFTER YOU, DOCTOR.

An Hour Later.

ALL RIGHT, I'M *IN*.

IT'S JUST THE *LOCAL HOLONET*, BUT--SHOULD BE ENOUGH TO GET SOME *DIRECTIONS* TO OUR *CYBERNETICIST*.

YOU, *UH*... YOU DO KNOW *THAT SHIP* WAS OUR ONLY *WAY OUT* OF HERE, RIGHT?

FORGIVE MY SAYING SO, BUT THAT'S APPALLING NONSENSE.

*WHEN ONE TAKES AN ENLIGHTENED ATTITUDE TO **MAKING OTHERS DO THINGS**, THE THINGS THEMSELVES BECOME FUNCTIONALLY **LIMITLESS**.*

"ENLIGHTENED ATTITUDE."

YOU MEAN-- NOT *FEELING BAD* ABOUT CAUSING PAIN OR DEATH.

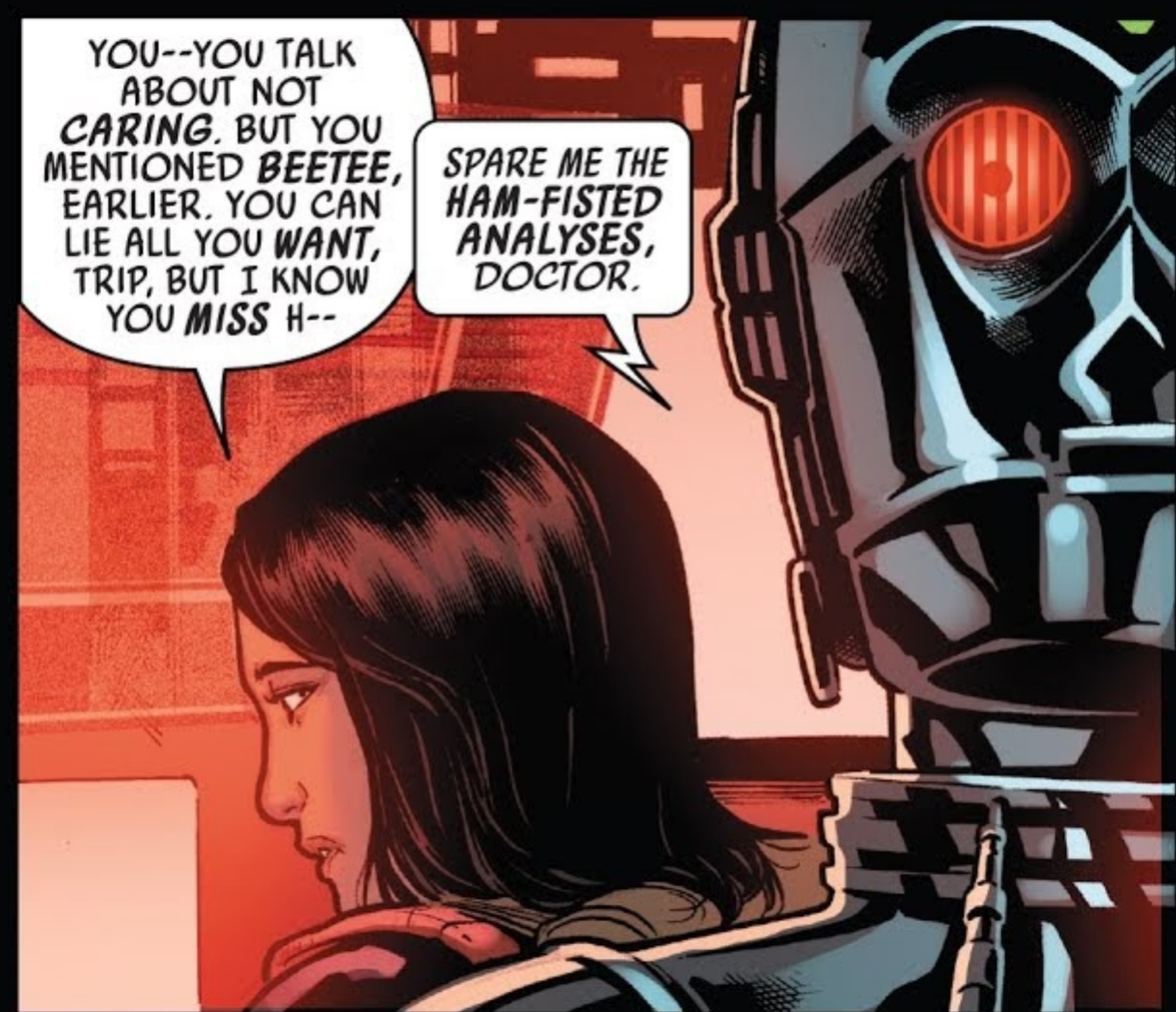
YOU SAY PALPATEEN, I SAY PALPATYNE.

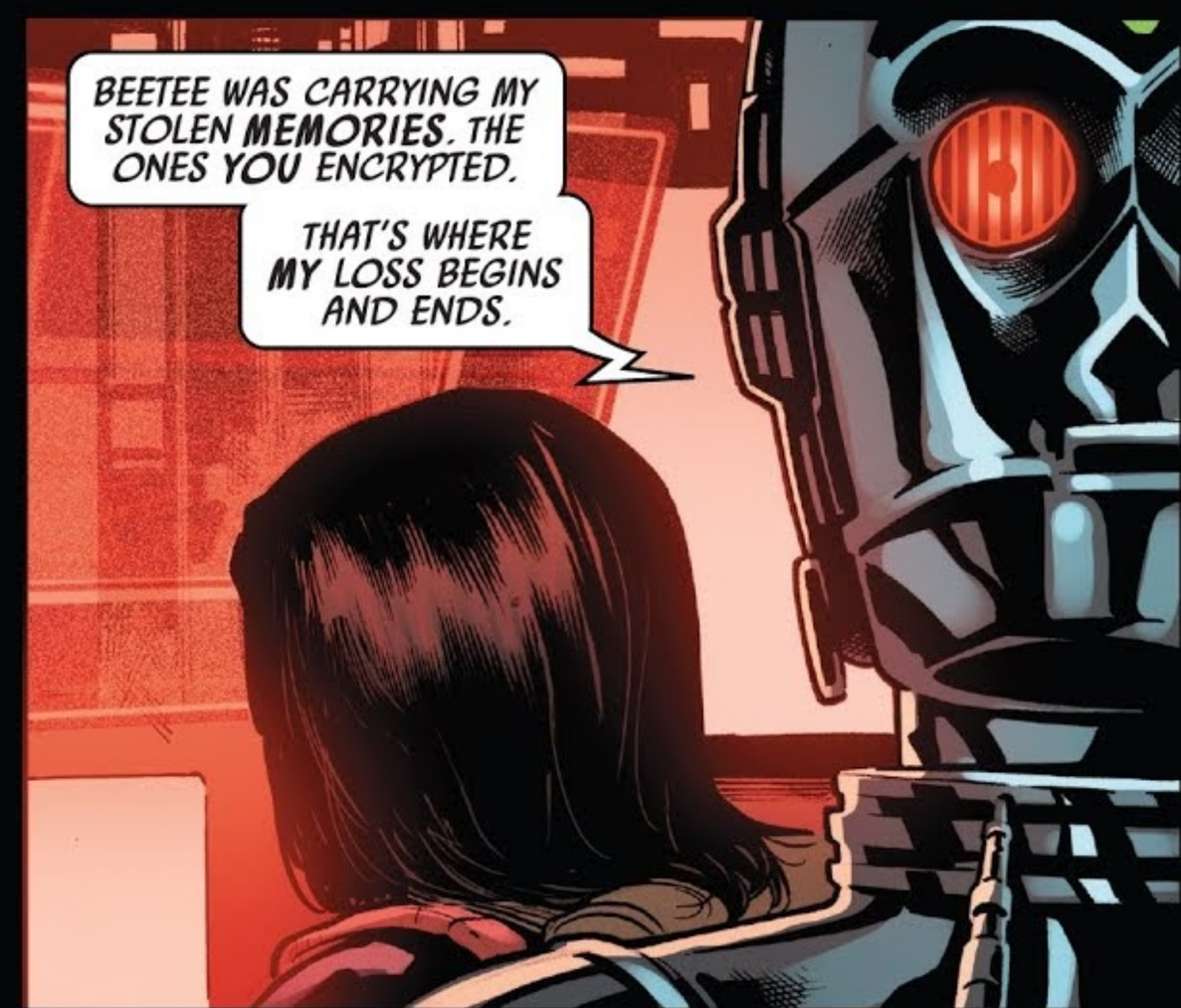
*AND **REALLY**, DOCTOR, WHICH IS **WORSE**: INFLICTING TERRIBLE THINGS UPON THOSE YOU CARE NOTHING **FOR**?*

*OR UPON THOSE YOU **LOVE**?*

*HOW **IS** INSPECTOR TOLVAN?*

RRRK-UT?
EHHH. ROMANTIC PARTNER.
THIS APHRA WOMAN LOVED HER, BETRAYED HER, CAUSED HER COMPLETE CEREBRAL EXPURGATION--THE USUAL. IT'S NOT IMPORTANT.
TH-THAT'S NONE OF YOUR BU--
I BEG TO DIFFER. IT'S MY BUSINESS IN AS MUCH AS YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE LOOKING FOR A CYBERNETICIST TO FREE US.
INSTEAD YOU'VE SPENT TEN MINUTES SEARCHING FOR NEWS ON AN M.I.A. IMPERIAL CAPTAIN WITH--I QUOTE--"SEXY METAL BITS."
SO? HOW IS SHE?
THERE'S NO RECORD.


YOU--YOU TALK ABOUT NOT CARING. BUT YOU MENTIONED BEETEE, EARLIER. YOU CAN LIE ALL YOU WANT, TRIP, BUT I KNOW YOU MISS H--
SPARE ME THE HAM-FISTED ANALYSES, DOCTOR.


BEETEE WAS CARRYING MY STOLEN MEMORIES. THE ONES YOU ENCRYPTED.
THAT'S WHERE MY LOSS BEGINS AND ENDS.

HIS DESTRUCTION SIMPLY MAKES ME DESPISE YOU MORE.

IN FACT: TELL ME, DOCTOR. DO YOU HAVE A MIRROR?
UH--NO. WHY?
OHH, A SMALL THING.

THE INDIVIDUAL WHO ATTACHED ME TO YOU IS WATCHING US. ENJOYING OUR SUFFERING. I'D LIKE TO LOOK HIM IN THE EYE. JUST ONCE.
BEFORE I COME FOR HIM.

IF...IF I SAID I'D FOUND THE CYBERNETICIST, WOULD YOU LET ME DEAL WITH HIM? NONE OF THIS-- SINISTER THREAT STUFF.
LET ME SHOW YOU THE CIVILIZED WAY CAN WORK JUST AS WELL.

MADAM, I AM A PROTOCOL DROID.
CIVILIZED IS WHAT I DO.

Nearby.

DOCTOR RAJAM NUSS?

WE'D LIKE TO HIRE YOU ON A--UH--DISCRETIONARY BASIS--TO REMOVE A PAIR OF EXPLOSIVES FROM OUR PERSON.

UHHH. WHATNOW?

I'D DISARM THEM MYSELF, ONLY I'M NO GOOD WITH ORGANICS, AND--

--AND I'M AFRAID I SIMPLY REFUSE TO ALLOW THIS TREACHEROUS BLOODBAG ANYWHERE NEAR MY PERSONALITY MATRIX.

NOW, YOU SHALL PERFORM THESE SERVICES FOR US, OR--

--OR WE WILL HAVE NO REASON TO GIVE YOU THIS BAG OF CREDITS.

CIVILIZED.

I, UH. I SUPPOSE YOU'D BEST COME IN.

"NUUUUUURK-NURR-RT-RT-RT?"

"WORRIED? HA!"

WHY SHOULD I BE *WORRIED?* I'M AN *ARTIST*, PONDA! I STAND BY MY *WORK*. THAT TWO-BIT *AMATEUR* WON'T BE ABLE TO EXTRICATE MY DETONATORS.

RRRRK-UT-UT...

WELL... *YES...*

"...THE DROID *IS* A LITTLE, *AH, UNNERVING.*"

HELLO THERE, DEAR REFLECTION. I'LL BE SEEING YOU *DREADFULLY* SOON...

THERE IT IS ON THE SCANNER, MA'AM--JUST LIKE YA SAID! Y'KNOW, YOU'RE *LUCKY* YOU TWO CAME HERE!

THIS RIG'S DESIGNED BY *PROFESSOR PREXO* HIMSELF--BEST CYBERDOC THERE IS!

OLD WINDBAG'S *CLASSES* ALWAYS PUT ME TO SLEEP, BUT HE SURE CAN PROGRAM AN *AUTO-SURGEON!*

GET YOURSELVES *COMFY, HUH?* THIS WON'T TAKE A MOMENT. TRUST ME!

LAB: *ACTIVATE!*

SCANNING *VOICE-IDENT* AND *HEAT-SIG.* AUTHORIZED USER *RECOGNIZED.*

ACTIVATING.

UHM...

...TRIP?

AH, OF COURSE...

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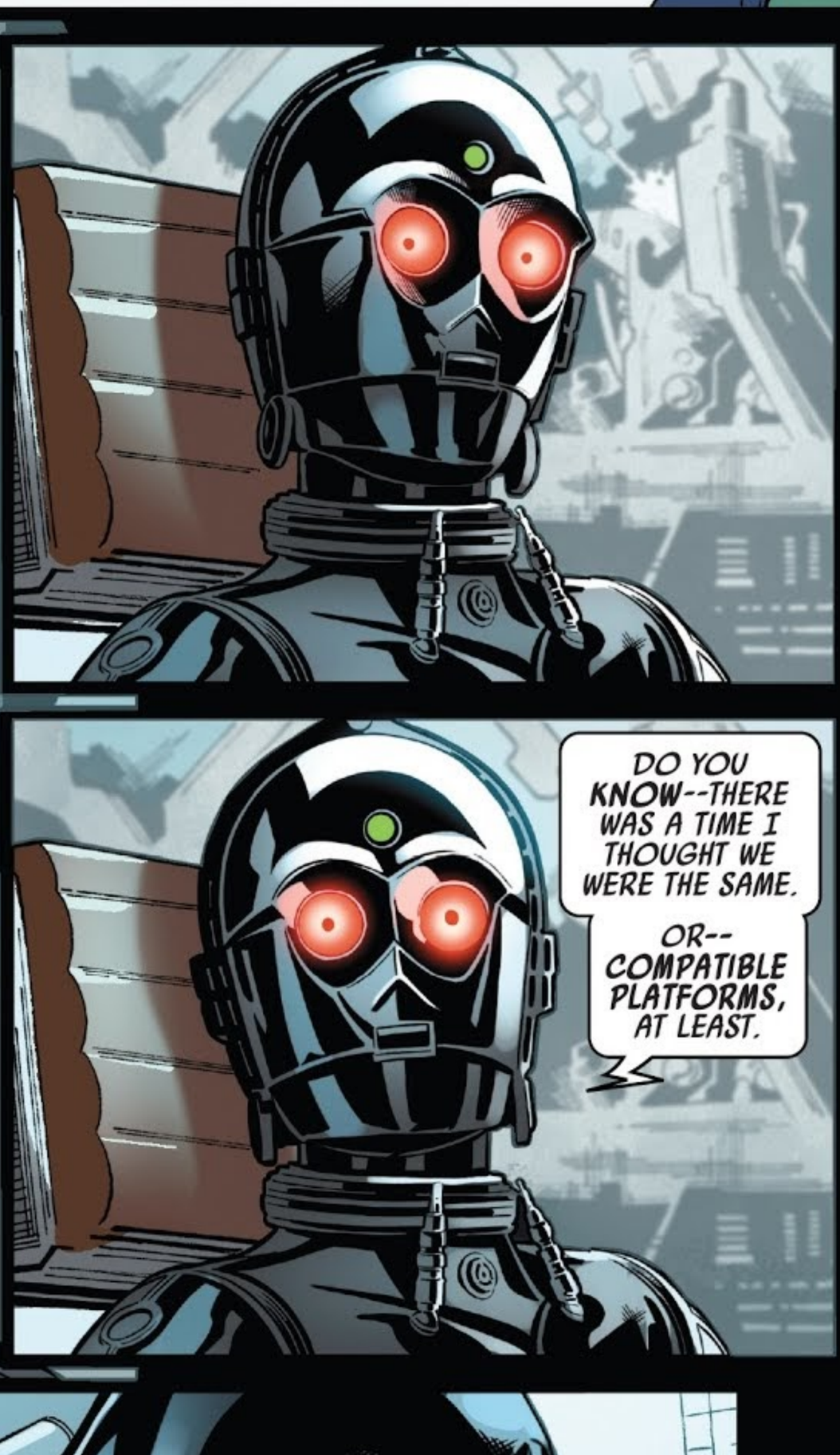
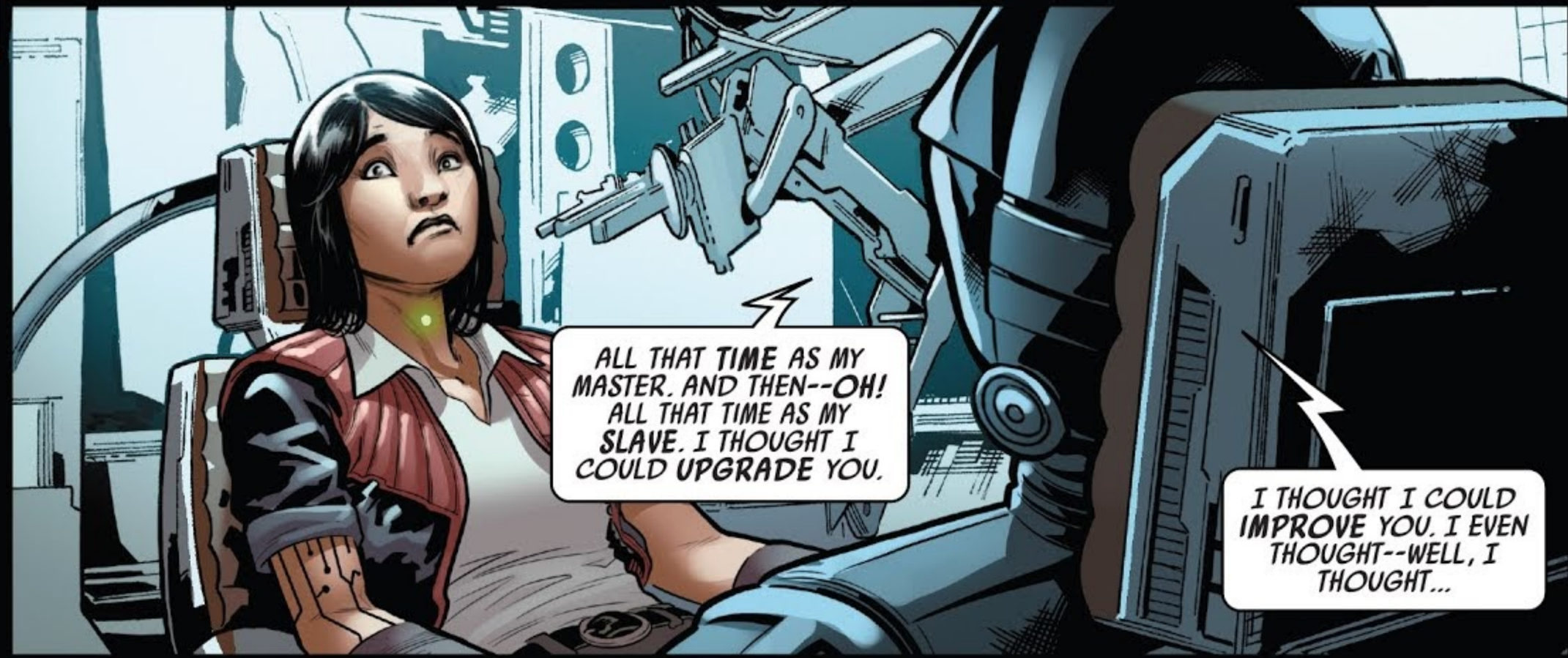
...I EXPECTED THIS.
YOU'D LIKE TO KNOW WHAT I INTEND TO DO TO YOU ONCE THE BOMBS ARE REMOVED.
I-IT'S JUST... LOOK--I'M SORRY I ENCRYPTED YOUR MEMORIES.

I WAS-- I WAS MAD AND SCARED, AND I NEEDED ALL THE INSURANCE I COULD GET.
BUT...BEETEE HAD THE DATA-DISC AND--HE'S GONE, TRIP. YOU COULDN'T UNLOCK IT NOW EVEN IF YOU TORTURED ME FOREVER. I'M USELESS TO YOU.
CAN'T YOU JUST--LEAVE ME HERE?


DO YOU KNOW--THERE WAS A TIME I THOUGHT WE WERE THE SAME.
OR-- COMPATIBLE PLATFORMS, AT LEAST.


ALL THAT TIME AS MY MASTER. AND THEN--OH! ALL THAT TIME AS MY SLAVE. I THOUGHT I COULD UPGRADE YOU.
I THOUGHT I COULD IMPROVE YOU. I EVEN THOUGHT--WELL, I THOUGHT...

I LIKED YOU.

BUT YOU REGRET, DOCTOR APHRA. YOU INVITE GUILT. WHY, YOU EVEN APOLOGIZED TO ME, JUST A MOMENT AGO.

THESE ARE DESIGN FLAWS I CANNOT TOLERATE. SO: YES.

I'M AFRAID THAT I INTEND TO MURDER YOU EXCEEDINGLY SLOWLY.

ON THE OTHER HAND, I'M NOTHING IF NOT A SENTIMENTALIST, AND YOU HAVE MADE RECENT TIMES SO DREADFULLY ENTERTAINING.

SO I BELIEVE I SHALL GIVE YOU A FIVE-MINUTE HEAD START. MY LITTLE GIFT TO YOU.

PROGRAMMING COMPLETE. SEDATING SUBJECTS IN 10...9...8...

S-STATISTICS, TRIP.

THEY--THEY PROGRAM NORMAL DROIDS TO HELP PEOPLE BECAUSE, O-ON A LONG ENOUGH TIMELINE...

...COOPERATION HAS A BETTER OUTCOME THAN BETRAYAL...

I AM NOT A NORMAL DROID, CHELLI.

AND I'M AFRAID YOUR TIMELINE HAS BECOME VERY--

--VERY SHORT.

Another Hour Later.
WAKEY WAKEY, YOU LUCKY KIDS! ALL DONE! BOMBS REMOVED AND DESTROYED! TOLJA YOU COULD TRUST ME!
NOW IF WE CAN JUST SETTLE THE MINOR MATTER OF MONEY REAL QUICK, YOU BUSY FOLKS CAN GET ON OUT THERE, AND UH, OUTTA MY LAB.
I'LL HANDLE PAYMENT, DOCTOR.
CIVILIZED, TRIP. Y-YOU PROMISED.
YES, YES, YES. AND REMEMBER: FIVE MINUTES.
...I'LL SEE YOU SOON.
WWWWAIT.
NOW: BEFORE WE CONCLUDE OUR BUSINESS, MR. NUSS, I DO HAVE ONE OTHER LITTLE TASK FOR YOU.
O-OH YEAH...?

YES. I NEED YOU TO TRACE THE **BROADCAST SIGNAL** BEING SENT FROM MY EYES.

NRRK--

I, UH. TH-THAT IS...

N-NO. NO, I DON'T HAVE THE **EXPERTISE**. M-MY **MENTOR**--PROFESSOR PREXO--HE COULD DO **IT**. TRY **HIM!**

I **SEE**. SO WHAT YOU'RE SAYING IS THAT YOU'RE **MEANINGLESS** TO ME, EXCEPT AS A CLAIMANT UPON THESE **CREDITS?**

EXACTLY. YOU SHOULD--YOU SHOULD **PAY UP** AND **GO**.

I DO BEG YOUR PARDON, BUT THERE'S REALLY NO NEED TO BE...

UNCIVIL.

NOK NOK NOK

TRIP! **TRIP**-- I CHECKED THE SCANNER! THAT BANTHA-LICKER'S **LYING!**

THE BOMBS'RE STILL INSIDE US!

RAAAAAAY!

H-HE WAS JUST TRYING TO GET **RID** OF US, TRIP! HE MESSED IT UP! CLUMSY MORON TRIGGERED A **FAIL-SAFE!**

THERE'S A **COUNTDOWN** NOW!

I CAN TRY TO USE THE RIG **MYSELF**-- M-MAYBE STOP THE **COUNT**--BUT-- WE NEED HIM **ALIVE** TO ACTIVATE THE **LAB**, TRIP! **HEAT SIGNATURE** AND **VOICE!**

OTHERWISE WE'VE--WE'VE ONLY GOT--

PSSSHHHT

OH NO.

...WE'VE ONLY GOT TEN HOURS BEFORE THE BOMBS BLOW.
OOPS.
To Be Continued!

DOCTOR APHRA
NEXT ISSUE:
A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away is a lot easier to get to than you think! Write us at StarWars@Marvel.com to make it into a future letters page. Mark your notes "OKAY TO PRINT." If the Force is truly strong with you—tweet us! #aphracomic and #oktoprint